

Michigan
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Articles in Today's Clips

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\$27 million deal would relocate Human Services

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

By Kyla King

Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A complex deal is in the works that could relocate the cramped headquarters of Kent County's state-run Department of Human Services office from 415 Franklin St. SE to the current Sheldon Complex a few blocks away.

The \$27 million deal involves the state, Kent County, Grand Rapids Public Schools and the city of Grand Rapids and would create one central city location for human service needs, including food stamps, cash assistance, job training and health clinic care.

Grand Rapids city commissioners are to act on an agreement today that would give Kent County the option to buy the land needed to construct a new building and lease it to the state.

The plan -- which still depends on Kent County and state officials reaching a lease agreement -- is the closest both sides have come in almost 20 years to finding a replacement for a site county officials have called an "embarrassment." The current, aging location is owned by the county and leased by the state.

Construction of a new facility would begin in 2008.

"We are cautiously optimistic that maybe the planets will align and we can get this thing done," said County Commission Chairman Roger Morgan, R-Rockford. "There are some hurdles we need to get over."

Despite pressure from Kent County officials to find a new place to house the state-run welfare agency, relocating has not been a top priority for state officials. Construction of a new building was approved in early 2000, but the state later overturned that decision because of concerns about the location.

Morgan said talks took a serious turn last fall only after then-Commission Chairman David Morren gave the state the ultimatum of finding a new location or being evicted from the county-owned Franklin Street site by June 30.

Morgan said even though discussion with the state is ongoing, the county needs to secure options from the city to buy about 6 acres needed for the building and parking.

The deal moved a step closer Monday when a school board committee recommended the full board approve a plan to sell a building at 811 Jefferson Ave. SE to the city for \$580,000. The city then would combine the school property with its Sheldon Complex site and a smaller city-owned parcel, and sell an option to the county to buy all three parcels for about \$2 million. The Sheldon Complex, which houses city and county programs, would be torn down.

The county would sell bonds to finance the \$27 million project, with 80 percent being paid back by the state through the lease agreement. The remainder would be covered by the county and city.

The cost is expected to be less than \$200,000 a year for all parties, said Deputy City Manager Eric DeLong. The deal is attractive to the city because it consolidates welfare services in the inner city and will provide modern offices for a job training program the city runs with Kent County, a program that already is housed at Sheldon Complex, he said.

"We've been working together to create an excellent solution to a long-standing community problem," DeLong said.

Assistant County Administrator Mary Swanson said state officials would rather the county build the facility because Kent's credit rating will keep the bonding costs low.

Discussions with the state have not come without "frustrations," Morgan said. The two sides have wrangled over ownership of the building after the lease expires, among other things. Regardless, Morgan said county commissioners are committed to sticking to their deadline to have an agreement ironed out by mid-July.

"To me, it's a real deadline, because we've been waiting years," he said. "If that doesn't happen, we're going to have to deal with (a possible eviction)."

Edward Woods III, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Management and Budget, which is negotiating with the county, said the lease is "under review."

"This is not something we're looking to hold up, it's just something that we want to give due diligence before we move forward," said Woods.

Preliminary plans call for the county to build a 127,500-square-foot facility that would house all the area's human service operations, including those now located at a satellite office in Cascade Township. The building also would hold the Kent County Health Department clinic that serves low-income residents, and the city-county run ACSET employment and training service. Kent County's Swanson said if the deal goes through, county officials would work with neighborhood residents in designing the building.

Press staff writer Dave Murray contributed to this story.

Kids home alone? What a parent should do

By Jil Schult, Journalism Intern

Gaylord Herald Times

June 26, 2006

OTSEGO COUNTY - Though the drama probably won't be as exciting as Macaulay Culkin's character, Kevin, who was accidentally left behind in "Home Alone," there are still some guidelines to follow when leaving a child home alone.

Bruce Bailey, **Otsego County Dept. of Human Services** (DHS) supervisor, said you definitely don't want friends over when parents aren't home.

"Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior," he said.

Bailey said parents should ask themselves these questions before leaving your child home alone:

€ What is the child's age?

€ Are they vulnerable?

€ Are their friends developmentally at an age to be left alone? (people choose friends similar to themselves).

€ Where is the location? (Is the closest house five miles away?)

€ If they ride the school bus, how do they act on the bus?

When Bailey receives a report that a child is left home alone, he calls and asks the the children a few basic questions. Though he's not required to notify the parent's of his call, he does let them know that he spoke with their child and decides whether or not the case needs further investigation. He asks the child:

€ Are you safe?

€ Do you feel safe?

€ If your brother gets hurt, what are you going to do?

"I asked a child the other day," said Bailey, "suppose your brother got hit in the head with a rock. What would you do?"

In true sibling spirit the boy answered, "Did I throw the rock or did somebody else?"

He then offered, "If he wasn't OK, I'd call 911, then call my mom."

Knowing who to call and where phone numbers are located are one of the most important first steps in preparing your home to leave a child alone.

Montmorency County Undersheriff Patty Skarbek advises knowing exactly when to leave a child home is different in each family. Some are ready and more mature at 11 or 12 years old and some babysit at 12 or 13.

Start with a trial run, Skarbeck added. Leave the child home alone for maybe 30 to 60 minutes the first time. Then go to three or four hours during the day.

Though some children are comfortable being left home alone during the day, “sometimes they get afraid when they're left home at night,” Skarbek said.

And don't hesitate checking up on them.

“I'd have my friends call,” said Skarbek, “or somebody the kids don't recognize.” This simple test allows the parent to know how the child interacts with strangers.

State chosen for foster care program

Gongwer News Service

June 26, 2006

Michigan is one of six states chosen by the National Governors Association to participate in a program to help young people in foster care “transition out” of the system successfully.

The ability of foster care children to succeed on their own once they reach 18 and are emancipated from the system has been a growing concern as studies show nearly half of these youth drop out of school and are more subject to substance abuse, homelessness, teen pregnancy and suicide, according to the NGA.

Michigan along with California, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota and South Carolina was chosen by the NGA’s Center for Best Practices to be part of its policy academy on youth transitioning out of foster care.

A team of high-level policymakers from Michigan and the other states, representing different state agencies and social organizations working with foster care youth, will meet together for the next year to discuss what practices could best help the young people. They will also try to develop new policies to help those young people moving out of the foster care system.

Crittenton Home worthy of support

Jackson Citizen Patriot editorial

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

The Florence Crittenton Home provides a valuable service to the state of Michigan as well as the Jackson community, which struggles with a high number of teenage pregnancies. It would be a shame if state budget woes were to force Florence Crittenton to reduce important services in what is a unique program in the state.

Florence Crittenton provides the only juvenile delinquent program for mothers in the state and has served thousands of Michigan girls and their babies since 1919. But money owed to Florence Crittenton by the state and a reduction in referrals that has reduced the number of those served by the agency recently forced Florence Crittenton to postpone paying its 50 employees for four days.

The \$30,000 bi-weekly payroll was due on June 15 but was paid June 19.

Florence Crittenton has 47 beds available for teenage mothers and mothers-to-be in its houses at 1603 Lansing Ave. and 521 Wildwood Ave., but recently just 18 of those beds were filled. To meet the agency's budget, beds must be 80 percent filled.

Robert Powell, executive director of the agency, said the houses are usually full but added that the state's budget problems are trickling down to his agency. About two-thirds of the agency's \$1.6 million in annual revenue comes from state and federal sources. The agency also has teen father and juvenile justice programs.

Powell said that in addition to cutting referrals to the home for girls in half since Christmas, the **state Department of Human Services** owes Florence Crittenton \$70,000. Powell has a meeting scheduled for July 17 with DHS officials, who canceled a recent meeting.

Shutting down one of the homes, therefore reducing the number of girls served, might be the only way to save the program, Powell said. We hope it doesn't come to that.

Girls currently spend about a year in the Lansing Avenue facility, and shortening their stays would certainly save money. But that would reduce the agency's ability to teach important life skills to new mothers and would make it little more than a place for girls to stay for a short time before and after their babies are born.

An important part of the program for the girls at Florence Crittenton is learning valuable skills that will help them survive and thrive after they leave. Those programs likely would be gutted if the normal length of stay were to be reduced.

According to Powell, diminished services would lead to more girls fending for themselves, and more of their children would spend extensive time in foster care. The end result, Powell said, would be more children in the welfare system.

Sometimes, you have to spend money to save money. It appears as if saving money by reducing services at Florence Crittenton would simply push that burden back on taxpayers later and at a higher cost.

It would be great if private donors would come forward to make up for the shortfall. Florence Crittenton must continue to seek funding and grants wherever possible. And the state should come through with the money it owes to the agency as well as continue to refer those in need into the program.

The issues the Florence Crittenton Home deals with aren't going away. The services shouldn't either.

Budget Status: This Week Still Possible

MIRS, Monday, June 26, 2006

Administration and legislative leaders polished up another meeting over the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget today, with another meeting scheduled Tuesday and the hopes that a final agreement can be reached before the July 4th weekend.

But even if the governor and key lawmakers can strike a deal involving the budget's main sticking points — lifetime limits for welfare recipients, the future of the Merit Scholarship, state pooling for state employees, etc. — the chances the entire FY 2007 budget will be wrapped up through conference committees and the final passage of bills this week is nil.

Now talk among those involved in the budget, are that if a deal can be reached this week, the nuts and bolts of implementing that agreement will happen during the tentative Wednesday sessions scheduled for July.

The schedule for the "target" talks is still a day-by-day decision, depending on the amount of progress accomplished at the meeting before. Sources indicate Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM has yet to make an appearance during the meetings, opting to let Lt. Gov. John **CHERRY** and Budget Director Mary **LANNNOYE**, do much of the heavy lifting.

Indications from the budget talks continue to be that the Republican-led Legislature is much more anxious to wrap up the budget (and get on with campaigning) than the administration.

De Vos pushes welfare time limit

Gongwer News Service

June 26, 2006

The question of whether and how to enact a four-year time limit for receiving welfare benefits was renewed Monday when Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos urged Governor Jennifer Granholm to support a broad policy on the issue. Ms. Granholm vetoed such a limit late last year, but Republicans in the Legislature have kept it as a priority agenda item, with the House including restrictions in a supplemental budget ([HB 4309](#)) and the Senate leader seeking to tie it to other issues.

The governor has said she would support a lifetime four-year limit for able-bodied adults, but said that is contingent on the person having no barriers to self-sufficiency, such as educational or health limitations and called for flexibility in handing down sanctions.

Mr. DeVos, who had included the limit in his Michigan Turnaround plan released last week, said it would save the state \$40 million a year.

Michigan's cash assistance program is limited to families with children, and when the nation ended welfare as an entitlement in 1996, former Republican Governor John Engler led approval of a plan that is now one of just two states without any lifetime limit. Most states have a five-year limit.

Mr. DeVos said Michigan has 9,294 people who have been on welfare for over five years, the maximum period for which matching federal funds are permitted, though states are allowed to have a portion of their caseload that exceeds that limit.

He said Ohio has 149 people who have been receiving welfare for over five years while the numbers for Illinois and Indiana are zero.

"Instead of focusing on trapping families in a cycle of dependence, we need to be assisting in empowering people. The best way that we can do this is by setting a limit on the amount of time an able bodied adult can receive assistance from our state," Mr. DeVos said in a statement. "Not only is it the right thing to do, it is the compassionate thing to do."

DeVos campaign spokesperson John Truscott said more details on the human services agenda will be released later, but said in general, persons who are severely handicapped or mentally ill would be among those who would be exempt from the four-year limit espoused by the candidate. He added the four-year limit is "more in line with the rest of the country."

Granholm spokesperson Liz Boyd said the administration is working with legislators on how to implement time limits, which she said the governor "has always supported for those who can become independent but chose not to." She said the governor's proposal is designed to help a total of 26,000 families with job skills training, health care assistance, specialized training and other assistance to help them become independent.

“Obviously, making certain that we have the appropriate balance with (work) exceptions is important,” she added. “We’re not about the balance the state’s budget on the backs of poor children.”

Mr. Truscott said Mr. DeVos does not want to harm those children and supports day care and other programs for the benefit of children, but added, “At the same time, we don’t want them exposed to and trapped in a cycle of poverty.”

The most recent monthly figures showed Michigan had a total cash assistance caseload of 79,133 cases in May representing 213,562 people.

The Department of Human Services puts the cases of more than five-years duration a little higher, at 10,656, and puts the number that have exceeded four years at about 15,500. The number of children involved in those households is about 26,600 in cases which have exceeded the five-year period and 38,750 in the cases of over four years duration.

Mr. DeVos also said if the state fails to act, it faces a federal penalty of over \$100 million.

The state does face a \$108 million potential federal penalty if it does not meet work participation rates that go into effect October 1, but DHS spokesperson Maureen Sorbet said the administration does expect to meet the goals, especially with the pilot program launched this year dubbed Jobs, Education and Training (JET) intended to improve assessment of job skills of recipients, and provide training and support both prior to and after employment.

The JET program was expanded this year by the agency to include about 49 percent of the caseload, which House Republicans said would be inadequate to meeting the work participation goals of 50 percent.

Michigan currently has about 34 percent of welfare recipients working.

DeVos Hops On A Couple Issues

MIRS, Monday, June 26, 2006

Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick **DeVOS** told Republican legislative leaders that if it's holding up the passage of the "Castle Doctrine" bills to prevent Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** from taking credit for the bills' signage, to stop. The subject of the legislation is too important to keep off the books, he said.

"Political advisors often caution me about allowing the current governor the opportunity to take credit for the passage of key laws during an election year," DeVos wrote. "Well, I guess I'm not your typical politician because I have concerns about the current delay in the advancement of this legislation.

"The passage of this law is far too important to allow political posturing to impede the progress. Therefore, I'm asking you to please move the legislation and allow the governor to take credit for its passage, if she so chooses.

"The residents should be allowed to protect their families and homes without the fear of victim prosecution. This is an urgent matter of public safety and security."

Granholt Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** said today that Granholt supports the "Castle Doctrine" bills.

On other legislative issues today, DeVos also called on the governor to approve the 48-month lifetime limits on able-bodied welfare recipients as is currently being proposed by the House Republican caucus. The Republican gubernatorial candidate says Michigan currently has 9,294 people who have been on welfare for more than five years. Ohio has 149. Indiana and Illinois have zero.

"Instead of focusing on trapping families in a cycle of dependence, we need to be assisting in empowering people," DeVos said. "The best way that we can do this is by setting a limit on the amount of time an able-bodied adult can receive assistance from our state."

Judge OKs Abraham's move to halfway house

Web-posted Jun 27, 2006

By STEPHEN FRYE

Of The Oakland Press

One day, perhaps next summer, Nathaniel Abraham, who was one of the youngest people ever charged with murder after killing a man at age 11, will golf at an area country club.

Daniel Bagdade, his attorney for almost a decade, said he intends to keep a promise he made to take the young man golfing.

But first, Abraham, 20, will be moving soon from a juvenile detention camp in northern Michigan and into a Bay City halfway house, a move approved by Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore on Monday.

With Abraham set to be released from custody at age 21 - no matter how he progresses through the rehabilitative programs - the judge wanted Abraham to experience life as he will face it come Jan. 19, his birthday.

His current stay at the **Nokomis Challenge Center in Prudenville** will be short, only about two months, but the progress reports have been good. He has gone on two, five-day camping trips, and while his empathy level still needed work and he was at times defensive when challenged, he showed leadership and the ability to work through problems, several social workers reported. He hasn't had fun on the camping trips into the Upper Peninsula, being eaten by black flies in downpours, but he worked well with a team, workers said.

"He's handled the frustrations really well," said Linda Walker, wilderness instructor at Nokomis, who said Abraham gave up his sleeping bag for another youth after rain and wind blew over their tent.

If he completes his final programs at Nokomis, next month he will be moved to the Parmenter Community Justice Center, a 13-bed, low security halfway house. He will be allowed to go to work and attend school.

"I'm pleased," Bagdade said. "He's ready."

Chief Deputy Oakland County Prosecutor Deborah Carley made a mild objection, preferring that he spend the full six months required at Nokomis.

The judge said: "You've had all the help you can get at this point. You'll be out without anyone telling you what to do. You'll make all the decisions yourself."

It's been a long road for Bagdade and Abraham, as the lawyer was assigned to represent the then-pre-teen, who has arrested for shooting Ronnie Greene Jr., in October 1997. Abraham didn't know Greene, taking a sniper shot with a stolen gun at the 19-year-old as he walked out of a Pontiac party store.

Bagdade, 57, said he would never hesitate to have Abraham, who was convicted of second-degree murder at age 13, over for dinner at his West Bloomfield Township home.

A lifelong Detroit area resident who is married with two adult children, Bagdade said Abraham is tremendously interesting and an intelligent young man who has a good sense of humor. The lawyer said Abraham wants to prove to everyone, especially the judge, that he is a redeemable person.

"He's intent on proving the naysayers wrong," Bagdade said. "He wants to show everybody that Judge Moore made the right decision" to sentence him as a juvenile, ensuring his release at age 21.

The judge, in an eloquent speech to Abraham about what lies ahead for him, said this does not put the juvenile justice system on trial as to whether it can rehabilitate a troubled boy.

"It's been a long case," Moore said. "It's not over yet. It probably won't be over until you die. The juvenile justice system will carry on no matter what happens in this case."

The judge warned that the media will scrutinize Abraham.

"It wouldn't be the first time I've been hounded by reporters," Abraham told the judge. "I can just refuse to talk and go on about my business."

Moore listed the many people who have worked with Abraham over the past eight years in state custody following more than a year locked up in an Oakland County facility.

"They care about you, and they like you," Moore said. "I don't think you're all the way there, but you've made progress. They've gone beyond what they're supposed to do."

"You're the only person ... who can make the decision as to whether you have changed or whether you will offend again. I don't know whether you succeed or not. I sure hope so."

While Abraham's ups and downs have affected Bagdade greatly, the lawyer said he never has been angry with Abraham, even when aggressive behavior on the basketball court has hindered his progress in Moore's eyes.

"I've been disappointed with some of the reports through the years," he said.

But now that the door to total freedom is within sight, Bagdade is most concerned that the last nine years have left Abraham lacking in socialization experience.

He is confident, though, that Abraham will be successful, focusing on his education now and his eye toward more realistic goals than being a professional basketball player or rap music star. Abraham is simply a normal young man, interested in sports, cars, girls, and even world problems.

"I intend to teach Nate how to play golf," Bagdade said.

Young killer could be in halfway house by July, judge says

A murderer at 11, 20-year-old aspires to enroll in college

By Brian Charlton

Associated Press

Published June 27, 2006

From the Lansing State Journal

PONTIAC - Nathaniel Abraham, who shot and killed a man when he was 11, could be moved to a halfway house as early as next month, allowing the 20-year-old to work and enroll in classes at a local college.

Abraham recently entered a lower-security juvenile lockup and has progressed to the point that Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Moore ruled Monday that he should be allowed to enter the halfway house in Bay City sometime in July. That will allow him to hold a job and attend classes at Delta College.

Daniel Bagdade, Abraham's attorney, endorsed the decision, while Deborah Carley, the county's chief deputy prosecutor, was unhappy with it. Carley said she always has felt that Abraham should have been sentenced to serve time in an adult prison. Bagdade said his client will not be a flight risk, given the newfound freedom.

"It's not an issue. He wants to succeed, and he really wants to show people who don't believe in him that he will succeed," Bagdade said.

Abraham was convicted of second-degree murder in the 1997 shooting death of Ronnie Lee Greene, 18, outside a convenience store in Pontiac. Though convicted as an adult, he was sentenced as a juvenile and is scheduled to be freed from all state supervision when he turns 21 on Jan. 19, 2007.

The case sparked debate on the treatment of juveniles accused of violent crimes. He was the first young person charged with first-degree murder to be prosecuted under a 1997 Michigan law that allowed adult prosecutions of children of any age in serious felony cases.

Abraham's case worker at the Nokomis Challenge Center in Prudenville - the lower-security juvenile facility in which he currently lives - said Monday that Abraham is progressing, but still needs to react better when he is criticized and also needs to improve his empathy skills.

During Monday's hearing, Moore ordered Abraham to stand and describe whether he felt he was ready to go to the Bay City halfway house, a 13-bed facility that is staffed 24 hours a day.

"I'd like to receive the benefits and services I can get before I turn 21 and take it one step at a time," Abraham told the judge.

Moore told Abraham that he was at a crossroads and needed to take advantage of his latest opportunity. "You're the only person in this courtroom who can make decisions - whether you'll change or will offend again," the judge said.

Abraham's next scheduled court date was set for Oct. 23.

Michigan teens faring better but problems linger for infants, kids in poverty

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

By Sarah Kellogg

Booth News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- While Michigan teens are thriving -- staying safer, having fewer babies and graduating from high school in larger numbers -- the long-term prospects for all the state's children may not be so good, a report released today suggests.

The KIDS COUNT study, which annually measures child health and safety nationally, shows the state's teens fared better in 2004 than they did in 2000 on four key indicators: teen births, teen deaths,

Yet at the same time, the number of Michigan children living in poverty rose from 354,000 in 2000 to 439,000 in 2004 a 29 percent increase. Eighteen percent of Michigan's 2.5 million children under the age of 18 were living in poverty.

"We've seen some real improvements in youth indicators," said Michele Corey, a spokeswoman for Michigan's Children, a Lansing-based child advocacy group. "But if our poverty rate continues to increase, it threatens all our progress."

"Poverty is probably the best predictor of almost every negative outcome for children."

It predicts infant mortality, low birth weights, dropout rates and teen pregnancy."

Overall, Michigan ranked 27th among the states on child well-being in the 2006 KIDS COUNT book. The state improved on six indicators -- dropout rates, teen births, child deaths, teen deaths, children living in single-parent families and the number of idle teens.

The report shows Michigan lost ground in four categories -- infant mortality, child poverty rates, the number of low-birthweight babies and the number of children living in non-working households.

The work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a Baltimore-based research foundation, the report uses the latest state and federal data available to track the states' changes over time. This year's data comes from 2003 and 2004.

KIDS COUNT's 10 indicators of child well-being

1. Percentage of low-birthweight babies, 7.9 in 2000, 8.2 in 2003.
2. Infant mortality rate, 8.2 in 2000, 8.5 in 2003.
3. Child death rate (deaths per 100,000 children), 22 in 2000, 21 in 2003.
4. Teen death rate (deaths per 100,000 teens), 64 in 2000, 55 in 2003.
5. Teen birth rate (births per 1,000 females), 40 in 2000, 34 in 2003.
6. Teen dropout rate, 10 percent in 2000, 7 percent in 2004.
7. Percentage of idle teens, 9 percent in 2000, 8 percent in 2004.
8. Percentage of children living with parents without full-time work, 31 percent in 2000, 34 percent in 2004.
9. Children in poverty, 14 percent in 2000, 18 percent in 2004.
10. Children living in single-parent households, 32 percent in 2000, 31 percent in 2003.

Michigan child advocates say the improvements in teen indicators reflect successful efforts by local school districts to encourage kids to stay in school and by the state to target bad behaviors, such as careless driving.

For example, they point to the state's graduated driver's license for teens as a factor in the reduction of teen deaths. The graduated license requires teens to be trained and then demonstrate driving skills before they obtain a license at the age of 18.

The state's high school dropout rate showed a 30 percent decrease between 2000 and 2004. In 2000, 10 percent of teens between 16 and 19 dropped out compared with 7 percent in 2004. Michigan's teen birth rate continued its decline. The number of births per 1,000 teen girls dropped from 40 in 2000 to 34 in 2003. The teen death rate dropped as well from 64 deaths per 100,000 teens age 16 to 19 in 2000 to 55 deaths in 2004.

For all the success with teens, the news was not as good for the state's youngest citizens. Michigan's infant mortality rate increased along with the number of low-birthweight babies between 2000 and 2003 -- both signs of poor infant and maternal health.

In 2003, the infant mortality rate for the state was 8.5 deaths per 1,000 live births. That is above the above the national average of 6.9 deaths. Michigan's ranking nationally fell from 39th in 2000 to 43rd in 2003.

"We know what we need to do, but we don't have the resources to do it," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a spokeswoman for the Michigan League for Human Services, an anti-poverty group in Lansing. "Sixty percent of the infants who died in Michigan died in five counties. We really need to push services to mothers in those areas, but we just don't have the money and it hasn't been a priority."

The five counties, which also account for 54 percent of the state's births, were Genesee, Kent, Macomb, Oakland and Wayne.

Zehnder-Merrell said an especially troubling aspect of the data is that black children under the age of 1 are more likely to die than white children. In 2003, the white infant mortality rate was 6.7 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 17.5 per 1,000 births for black infants.

State officials acknowledge that they face a complex mix of successes and failures as they craft programs that deal with child well-being.

"There is so much in the KIDS COUNT report that is hopeful," said Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. "The challenges we face, particularly in the area of child poverty, are not surprising in our state with some of the economic challenges we have."

Udow said that if the state hopes to get control of child poverty, the state will have to invest in parents, especially mothers, ensuring they have solid jobs and good health care. Child poverty, she notes, is directly connected to adult poverty.

"If you invest, these programs pay off," said Udow, noting that jobs, child care and maternal health programs make a difference. "They pay back both in terms of saving dollars in the long run and, most importantly, in saving lives."

Report: Michigan has fewer dropouts, more child poverty

Gongwer News Service

June 26, 2006

Life in Michigan has improved for youths on five indicators of child welfare, while in five other ways the lives of the state's youngest residents have gotten worse, according to the latest report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation set to be released Tuesday.

The KIDS COUNT Data Book released annually by the private family and human rights organization measures national trends in child well being by tracking 10 indicators.

This year's report used rates from 2003 and 2004 to measure against incidences in 2000 of low-birth weight babies; infant mortality; child death; teen death; births to teens; high school dropouts; teens not working or attending school; children living with underemployed parents; children in poverty and children living in single-parent families.

Michigan saw slight increases from 2000 of low-birth weight babies and infant mortality.

The number of children living in families where no adult has staple full-time employment saw an increase, while the percentage of children living in poverty rose sharply.

The number of high school dropouts decreased significantly, while four other areas in the state also improved, including a decrease in child and teen death, fewer teen births, stagnant teens and a smaller number of children living in single parent families.

The full report will be available on the foundation's [web site](#) on Tuesday.

More Mich. kids live in poverty

Infant mortality rate also up, but number of school dropouts declines in report on children

By Chris Andrews

Lansing State Journal

Published June 27, 2006

Children often can be seen at Lansing's New Hope Day Center run by the Volunteers of America to serve the homeless.

"A young mother who can't be 20 years old came in today, taking her toddler," said Patrick Patterson, vice president of operations. "It's just a sinking feeling any time you see kids who are homeless."

The number of Michigan children living in poverty rose sharply between 2000 and 2004, according to a study released today.

The national Kids Count report analyzing state-by-state data showed a mixed picture for Michigan children. Overall, Michigan ranked 27th, down two slots from a year ago.

Good news includes: fewer teens dying and fewer dropping out of school. The bad: a high and rising infant mortality rate and more children living in poor conditions.

"You know the cards are stacked against them, and they're already dealing with trying circumstances," Patterson said of the children he sees.

The annual Kids Count report is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation designed to track conditions of the most disadvantaged children and families.

The most glaring number was a 29 percent increase in children in poverty. The increase was from 14 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2004.

"We now have roughly one in five children living in poverty," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of the Kids Count in Michigan project. "A lot has to do with our economic slump."

The numbers also are reflected in Head Start classrooms around mid-Michigan. Officials make 4-year-olds the priority and often don't have room for 3-year-olds.

"The number of parents without full-time jobs is growing in this area," said Lucy McClintic, Head Start director of the Capital Area Community Services Preschool Program. "We have no trouble finding low-income children that meet the federal poverty guidelines."

Not all of the Kids Count report was gloom and doom.

The report showed a 30 percent drop in the percent of teens listed as high school dropouts. Those who earn general equivalency diplomas are not included in the number.

Zehnder-Merrell said the improvement could come for a couple of reasons: Students may be staying in school because they are coming to understand the importance of education, or they may be unable to find jobs.

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Getting a grip on poverty

More state, metro Detroit kids worse off as agencies seek answers

June 27, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Shantinique Pruiett, 13, of Detroit plays with her brother Jalen, 1, at the home of their grandmother, Linda O'Neal, 47, moving to another neighborhood, where the rent will be cheaper and where she expects there will be fewer drug houses.

Ask 10-year-old Quashawn Willis of Detroit what he plans to do this summer and his answer is pretty simple: "Nothing." Ask him what he'd like to do, and the answer is quick: "Go to Disney World."

That isn't likely to happen, because Quashawn lives with his mother, Michelle Griffin, 31, and sister Quachelle Williams, 3, in Brightmoor, a west-side neighborhood that is among the city's poorest. Griffin lost her last job at a Warren factory a year ago and now relies on help from her family to get by.

Her children are among a growing number of Michigan kids whose families are in poverty, according to the 2006 Kids Count study released today.

At the same time, the state's sluggish economy is also affecting programs for poor families.

Representatives from some of the nation's largest philanthropic organizations began arriving in Detroit on Monday for a conference convened by the Skillman Foundation on ways to strengthen private philanthropy in view of public cuts.

"No child should live in poverty," said Carol Goss, president and chief executive officer of the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation. "We're pleased that foundations across the nation are rallying around this issue."

In 2004, about 18% of the state's children lived in families with incomes below the poverty level, \$19,311 a year for a family of four, according to the Kids Count study.

That was a 29% increase over the number of poor children in Michigan in 2000.

Advocates for children already look back on the late 1990s as "the good old days" for kids, when the state and nation had programs targeting tough problems such as poverty.

How to help metro organizations:

- These are some of the organizations that offer programs to help poor children and families:
- ARISE Detroit (Activating Resources Inspiring Service and Empowerment) is a Skillman Foundation-funded initiative looking for volunteers and donors willing to work with community and school groups in Detroit. Go to www.arisedetroit.org or call 866-942-7473 anytime.
- Think Detroit, a nonprofit, works to provide recreational and educational programs for kids. Go to www.thinkdetroit.org or call 313-833-1600.
- The Coalition on Temporary Shelter, or COTS, provides shelter for homeless families. Call 313-831-3777 anytime.
- Forgotten Harvest, which collects and distributes tons of fresh food from area grocery stores and restaurants, can use donations of money, food or time. Go to www.forgottenharvest.org or call 248-350-3663 anytime.

"We had an economic boom the likes of which the state had not seen before," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for Kids Count in Michigan. "And we thought it was going to last forever, as did the policy makers, so they gave away state revenue when they should've saved it for a rainy day," she said.

In Wayne County, including Detroit, 30% of children ages 16 and younger in 2004 lived in families with incomes below the poverty level, compared with 25% in 2003.

The childhood poverty rate also rose in Macomb County, from 8% in 2003 to 9% in 2004. In Oakland County, the rate fell from 11% in 2003 to 5% in 2004. Zehnder-Merrell attributed the decrease to the generally brighter economic picture in Oakland County.

The poverty rate also figured into other areas that measure child well-being in Michigan, especially the infant mortality rate.

According to the study, Michigan's 2003 infant mortality rate of 8.5 deaths per 1,000 live births meant the state ranked 43rd among all states in rates of children who die before their first birthdays.

Overall, using 10 measures of child well-being, Michigan improved in six areas, including teen death rates, which dropped from 64 to 55 deaths per 100,000 youths from 2000 to 2003, compared with a national average of 66 deaths. Also, the percentage of the state's children who dropped out of high school fell by 30%, and births to teenagers dipped by 15% during the same period.

Michigan's overall ranking dropped from 26th to 27th.

Among the organizations attending this week's conference at the Omni Hotel are the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Heinz Endowments and the Foundation for Child Development.

Goss of the Skillman Foundation is expected to discuss her foundation's Good Neighborhoods initiative, launched in January in six Detroit neighborhoods chosen because they hold about one-third of the city's kids.

The hope is that the programs that are developed will have a wide impact, said William Hanson, Skillman's communications director.

Brightmoor, where Griffin and her two children live, is one of the communities, and the Rev. Dennis Talbert, pastor of the Rosedale Park Baptist Church, is one of the leaders of the Good Neighborhoods project in Brightmoor.

"You only have to drive through the neighborhood, or walk through the neighborhood, or hang out with the kids here to understand that socially we are declining, as well as economically," Talbert said Monday.

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Child poverty spikes in Mich.

State outpaces nation in infant mortality, study says; lagging economy cited as major factor.

Chrystal Johnson

The Detroit News

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

Mounting job losses and a rocky economy in Michigan have taken a toll on the state's children. According to Kids Count, a report to be released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, child poverty rose 29 percent from 2000 to 2004, compared to a 6 percent increase nationwide.

The report also shows that while the numbers of high school dropouts, teen pregnancies and teen deaths have declined, the infant mortality rate has remained stagnant, while the rate has improved in other states.

Michigan's infant mortality rate, 7.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, is higher than the national average of 6.9.

Lack of "prenatal care is one aspect of why there is a rise in infant mortality, but there are a lot of things: living conditions, planned pregnancy and late prenatal care," said Mary Bedard, clinical director of neonatal intensive care at Children's Hospital in Detroit.

Jane Zehnder-Merrell, senior research associate for Kids Count in Michigan, attributes the problem to economics.

"The state is in a deficit, and programs that help families and children are being cut," Zehnder-Merrell said. "Other states have improved since the last yearly report, and ours has stayed the same."

The report ranked Michigan 27th in the nation for child welfare based on 10 factors, including birth weights and death rates.

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Garfield wants private review of Medicaid claims

Gongwer News Service

June 26, 2006

The state would contract out its Medicaid claims process under legislation recently introduced in the House by Rep. John Garfield (R-Rochester Hills). Under HB 6260, a bidder could not control more than 15 percent of the state's healthcare market, excluding Medicaid and Medicare.

"We are doing a disservice to all Michigan residents if we allow the Medicaid system to wallow in its current form," Mr. Garfield said.

The legislation also calls for the House and Senate Appropriations committees to receive annual performance reports on the program. The Department of Community Health, which oversees the state's Medicaid program, is the largest general fund expenditure in the budget. The bill has been referred to the Health Policy Committee.

Bill Would Privatize Medicaid Processing

MIRS, Monday, June 26, 2006

Rep. John GARFIELD (R-Rochester Hills) will introduce a bill that would move all Medicaid claims processing to the private sector and would prohibit large companies such as Blue Cross, from bidding on claims contracts.

Specifically the bill would prohibit an entity that controls 15 percent or more of the health-care market from bidding on Medicaid claims processing contracts. Additional contracts would be achieved with a utilization and review company to ensure that services are appropriately provided.

"Sooner or later Michigan must face an inconvenient truth about Medicaid; its costs are spiraling to unsustainable levels," Garfield said. "One in four dollars in our general fund is used to cover the cost of this program. We must act now to reduce costs and bring the program under proper fiscal management. My plan will achieve this goal."

Garfield claims the bill would lower health-care costs, save taxpayers' money and provide more services to people who are considered at-risk. Policies and procedures also will be established to ensure that seniors with Medicaid eligibility would be able to live at home as long as it is feasible and medically appropriate.

"We are doing a disservice to all Michigan residents if we allow the Medicaid system to wallow in its current form," Garfield said. "My plan is a common-sense initiative that will make sure taxpayer dollars are used effectively while maintaining top-notch health care for people."

Blue Cross officials were not available for comment on this article.

Adoptive mother convicted of abuse

Web-posted Jun 27, 2006

By STEPHEN FRYE

Of The Oakland Press

A jury needed only about an hour to convict a Rochester Hills mother of first-degree child abuse Monday. The verdict ensures a several-year stay in prison for Tracey Ann Brosch, 44, who was charged with violently shaking her adopted baby.

Brosch showed no emotion when the verdict was announced. She is to be sentenced July 18, and the charge carries up to 15 years in prison.

The courtroom was heavy with emotion as several jurors appeared somber and a couple had tears in their eyes.

In the audience, Brosch's mother cried loudly, having to be pulled by family members out of the courtroom. In the public hallway, her uncontrollable weeping could still be heard inside as Brosch's soon-to-be exhusband stared forward.

Sentencing guidelines range from 36 to 60 months in prison, though Oakland County Circuit Judge Steven Andrews has been known to exceed guidelines in cases involving severe child abuse.

Brosch had earlier pleaded no contest to a reduced charge of second-degree child abuse, which carries up to four years in prison. But with guidelines ranging from probation to 17 months in prison, she withdrew her plea after Andrews indicated he would exceed those guidelines. Prosecutors were willing to let her plead to second-degree child abuse because they wanted her to plead to terminating her parental rights, which she did, and because of the difficulty in getting convictions for first-degree.

The difference in the two charges is the intent to knowingly cause injuries as opposed to simply committing a reckless act, but not realizing the consequences.

"We always worry about the issue of intent," said Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Sara Pope-Starnes.

But the jury quickly decided that Brosch had indeed caused the injuries to 22-month-old Kaitlyn, who nearly died of brain injuries and swelling consistent with being shaken and struck in the head nine months ago.

Today, she is living in a "medically fragile foster home," said Pope-Starnes. The infant can speak only a couple of words and has just started to walk. Kaitlyn, who had been adopted from China at 10 months old, had been at that stage when her injuries occurred Oct. 28.

Brosch adopted after learning she cannot have children because she has Turner's syndrome, leaving her short one chromosome.

The jury of nine women and three men asked for the evidence but quickly reached a verdict. Jurors told Oakland County Sheriff's Detective John Neph the evidence they regarded last and least was Brosch's demeanor, considering more the medical evidence and her unsatisfactory explanation of how the injuries may have occurred.

Defense attorney Richard Lustig portrayed police and doctors as ganging up on Brosch because of her inappropriate behavior - described as "nonchalant" and including laughter and casual joking during an intense family tragedy, by numerous witnesses - and jumping to a conclusion. But Lustig could not overcome the medical opinions of the doctors, led by Dr. Mary Smith, a pediatric specialist from William Beaumont Hospital, who treated Kaitlyn.

"She was at imminent risk of death," Smyth testified, detailing the subdural hematoma, massive retinal bleeding and massive brain swelling. "This just doesn't happen. In my 15 years of pediatric practice in dealing with hundreds and thousands of normal children who have had hundreds and thousands of normal daily accidents and normal illnesses and colds, this is not a normal experience."

Smith said with the injuries and without an adequate explanation, the diagnosis is nonaccidental head trauma, an adapted name for what was once called shaken baby syndrome.

City gets \$2.2M for Triangle property: Ferguson's deal may help bring southside center

By Tom Lambert

Lansing State Journal

Published June 27, 2006

A \$2.2 million check written by local developer Joel Ferguson to buy the city-owned Triangle property could help jump-start efforts to build a southside community center in Lansing.

Ferguson, who previously had an option to purchase the parcel, closed on it Monday. In 2002, he wanted to use it to build a new state police headquarters, but the state shelved the plan.

On Monday, Ferguson said he expects to put a "big office building" on the 3.56-acre riverside parcel on the northeast corner of Grand Avenue and Kalamazoo Street.

He wouldn't comment further.

"I can tell you, I am not going to spend that much money to keep it a parking lot," Ferguson said.

The Triangle sale gives the city about \$3.2 million to put toward a southside community center, which many residents in the area have wanted for more than a decade.

The city set aside \$1 million for the project in the 2006-07 budget, which starts July 1.

Since his State of the City address earlier this year, Mayor Virg Bernero made building a community center in the city's south side a top priority.

"The (money) we got today takes it from a one-day dream to a real-life potentiality," Bernero said.

Officials aren't sure where and when the community center would be built. One recommendation a previous committee made was the site of Our Savior Lutheran Church and School, 1601 W. Holmes Road.

The church, planning to build in Delta Township, is seeking \$3.2 million for the property, church officials have said.

The committee also had reviewed a proposal to build a new facility on seven acres at the southwest corner of Holmes and Pleasant Grove roads.

A new Southside Community Center Citizen Action Team will be tasked with recommending a site. The eight-member Lansing City Council would have to approve it.

"This is needed," said Frank Lain, chairman of the team. "We need positive recreation to replace the negative recreation in our area."

Currently, the south side has several places where youths can gather, including the Lansing Police Department's South Precinct, 3400 S. Cedar St., and Southside Community Coalition, 2101 W. Holmes Road.

Pete Cunningham, director of the Southside Community Coalition, said there is a great need for a new center.

"We just don't have the space in our building now for our 55 kids," he said. "This can't be anything but good news for the south side."

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Sex assault victim rips attacker, legal system

THE FLINT JOURNAL

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

By James L. Smith

LAPEER - A sexual assault victim lashed out at an Imlay City massage therapist and the legal system that took three years to convict him in a statement read to the judge who sentenced the man.

Michael Jimenez, 51, of Almont Township offered no apologies Monday to three victims before he was sentenced to 16 months to 24 months in prison by Lapeer Circuit Judge Nick O. Holowka. Jimenez also will be required to register as a sex offender.

He was convicted in late April of four counts of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct, but the jury acquitted him on the more serious counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Maintaining his innocence and promising an appeal, Jimenez said "I'm sorry it's gone this far. I never wanted to hurt anyone."

In a statement read by victim's advocate Cathy Strong, the victim criticized the court for allowing Jimenez to delay hearings and the trial for nearly three years.

"I put my trust in this system, and it has let me down," said the woman, who also asked Holowka to give Jimenez the maximum sentence possible.

Two of the victims testified that Jimenez sexually assaulted them while giving them a massage. Two of the victims came forward after the third filed a complaint.

Jimenez, who was working out of a chiropractor's office, had only recently received his massage license before the alleged offenses occurred in 2002 and 2003.

The chiropractor was not aware of the incidents. One of the victims, who received the massage as a birthday present, told police that it was her first massage.

The trial was delayed several times when Jimenez, unsatisfied with his court-appointed attorney, fired the firm and asked for new attorneys. Jimenez was represented by three attorneys during the case.

The victim who wrote the statement told Holowka that the constant delays caused emotional anguish and delayed closure for the victims.

"My husband himself is a soldier, who was serving overseas at the time of the assault and who is currently deployed to Iraq, dedicated to defending our rights as individuals even today," she wrote.

"I applaud his efforts to ensure even individuals such as Mr. Jimenez receive a fair trial. However, I submit to you that fair in no way means he should have been allowed to drag these proceedings out for so long."

The woman was seven months pregnant when the assault occurred.

"I felt as if the most beautiful, natural event in mine and my husband's life had been tainted by the sexual perversion of this individual," she said.



For the week ending 6/23/2006, Vol. XXVII, No. 17

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- House Passes Older Americans Act Reauthorization
- Community Health Centers Program Reauthorized in the House
- House Introduces PSSF Reauthorization Bill
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- Committee Report Limits PARTS Assessment and Implementation of Provider Tax
- Public Mental Health Emergency Preparedness Act Introduced
- APHSA/NASMD Letter Proposes Changes to CMS on Citizenship Verification Guidelines
- CMS Releases SMD Letter on DRA Cost-Sharing Provisions
- ACF Seeks Public Comments Regarding Information Collection
- David Berns Joins Casey Family Programs

Senate Appropriations Panel Marks Up FY 2007 Agriculture Spending Bill

On June 22, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its version of the fiscal year 2007 Agriculture Appropriations bill that was passed earlier in the week by the Agriculture subcommittee. The measure includes \$118.3 million in funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which the Bush administration has targeted for elimination in its FY 2007 budget request. The budget measure has called for current CSFP recipients to be transferred to the Food Stamp Program (FSP), but did not indicate how the transfer would have been accomplished. The budget plan appropriates \$37.9 million for the FSP, about the same as was requested by the administration, which is \$2.8 billion below last year. According to the budget request, FSP participation is estimated to be lower than the predicted level for last year. Other appropriations in the bill include \$13.65 billion for Child Nutrition Programs, \$5.24 billion for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, and \$179.36 million for the Commodity Assistance Program. The committee mark rejects the administration's proposal to limit nutrition services and administration grants. More information is available online at: <http://appropriations.senate.gov>.

House Passes Older Americans Act Reauthorization

On June 20, the House passed the Senior Independence Act, H.R. 5293 that reauthorizes programs under the Older Americans Act. The legislation is sponsored by Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-Ohio). The legislation gives the assistant secretary within the Administration on Aging to designate staff responsible for carrying out elder justice and abuse programs. This position would have responsibility over research and technical assistance to states. The bill also adds older Americans residing in rural areas and those with limited English proficiency to the priority list of those who should be paid particular attention in consultation, state plans, and for services. It also would alter the Older American Community Service Employment Program by increasing the focus on unsubsidized employment and decreasing the focus on community service. Participation time limits would be added to the program and the percentage of participants in a program that are engaged in unsubsidized employment would be

increased from the present 20 percent level up to 30 percent. The legislation also requires that cost-sharing be encouraged for individuals at or above 125 percent of poverty in any of the OAA programs. In addition to delivering meals, the program must include nutrition counseling.

Community Health Centers Program Reauthorized in the House

On June 21, the House passed legislation to reauthorize the community health centers program. The bill, H.R. 5573, referred to as the "Health Centers Renewal Act of 2006," authorizes \$10 billion in funding for the federal community health centers program between fiscal 2007 and 2011. The measure also maintains other elements of the program, including the requirement that health centers must be governed by a 51 percent patient majority board. Members of Congress used the opportunity to praise health centers for delivering high-quality care while saving billions of taxpayer dollars by reducing the need for more expensive in-patient, emergency room, and specialty care.

House Introduces PSSF Reauthorization Bill

On June 20, the U.S. House of Representatives introduced the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (H.R. 5640). The bill reauthorizes the Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Title IV-B, subpart 2, program through FY 2011. The bill limits the federal reimbursement for administrative costs under Title IV-B, subpart 1 percent to 10 percent of the total expenditures of a state and targets \$40 million from the mandatory funds to be applied towards a requirement that monthly caseworker visits occur in 90 percent of cases. Other provisions include an increase to 3 percent for the set-aside in the mandatory and discretionary portion for Indian tribes, reauthorization of the court improvement program through FY 2011, and reauthorization of the mentoring children of prisoners program through FY 2011. The legislation can be accessed at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Budget Committee Bill Looks at Medicaid and Other Entitlement Programs

On June 20, the Senate Budget Committee passed along party lines S. 3521, The Stop Overspending Act of 2006, which would affect mandatory program spending. It would give the president the authority to use a line item veto, establish biennial budget and appropriations, and require sequestration and rescission of discretionary and mandatory funding. The bill also calls for the establishment of a National Commission on Entitlement Solvency, which would focus on Medicaid, Social Security, and Medicare, and a second commission to review government agencies and programs and identify those that should be re-aligned or eliminated. Unlike other commissions, the bill would require Congress to introduce any legislative proposals of these commissions and further require key committees to report the bills within 30 days of introduction. If a committee does not take action, it would automatically be brought to the full House or Senate floor for consideration. It is unclear whether this legislation will be debated by the full Senate, but provisions included in it such as the line-item veto could be attached to other pieces of legislation.

Committee Report Limits PARTS Assessment and Implementation of Provider Tax

On June 20, the House Appropriations Committee released House Report 109-515, which includes the legislative text to the recently passed fiscal year 2007 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriation spending bill (H.R. 5647). In addition to a series of prohibitions on use of government funds appropriated in the bill, the report prohibits any funding from the bill to be used to implement the administration's FY2007 budget proposal to phase down the allowable provider tax rate that would be matched by the federal government from the current 6 percent to 3 percent. The report also prohibits funds allocated in the bill from being used to develop or participate in a Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) analysis or study unless approved by key congressional committees. The PART assessment, used by the Office of Management and Budget, was referred to in the administration's FY 2007 budget request to justify cuts to the Social Services Block Grant. The Child Support Enforcement Program has also been assessed using PART; and even though it was given one of the highest ratings of all government programs reviewed, the administration still supported cuts to the program as part of

the Deficit Reduction Act.

Public Mental Health Emergency Preparedness Act Introduced

On June 20, Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) introduced S. 3537, the Public Mental Health Emergency Preparedness Act of 2006, which would amend the Public Health Service Act to establish the National Center for Public Mental Health Emergency Preparedness (NCPMHEP). The legislation intends to address mental health concerns that will arise after public health emergencies, including both natural and man-made catastrophes, such as potential bioterrorist attacks. Specifically, the bill aims to provide the following four functions, in the wake of a disaster: (1) use evidence-based curricula to develop a network of trained emergency health professionals, (2) develop and maintain a clearinghouse of educational materials on public mental health emergency preparedness, (3) create a national forum for emergency health professionals in federal, state, and local governments, and (4) require annual evaluations of the NCPMHEP and the federal government efforts in building the national capacity of mental health emergency preparedness and service delivery capacity.

APHSA/NASMD Letter Proposes Changes to CMS on Citizenship Verification Guidelines

On June 21, the American Public Human Services Association/National Association of State Medicaid Directors sent a letter to Dennis Smith, director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations, outlining the states' suggestions for improvements to the recently released guidelines on the Medicaid citizenship verification requirements. The suggestions were compiled at the NASMD annual meeting held earlier this month and on a June 21 all-state call regarding the requirements. A sample of the suggestions include: extending the "reasonable opportunity period" for new applicants; excluding of dual-eligibles, foster and adoptive children, and presumptively eligible pregnant woman and children from the requirements; providing states the option to accept copies of documents to facilitate electronic or mail redeterminations; and accepting of verification conducted in another state. A copy of the letter can be viewed online at <http://www.aphsa.org/disabilities/publications/APHSA-NASMD-CitizenshipLetter.doc>. The SMD letter is available at <http://www.aphsa.org/disabilities/publications/CitizenshipSMD-letter.pdf>.

CMS Releases SMD Letter on DRA Cost-Sharing Provisions

On June 19 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released a Dear State Medicaid Director Letter providing guidance on the cost-sharing provisions included in sections 6041, 6042, and 6043 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA). These sections provide states with new options to introduce premiums and cost-sharing for Medicaid beneficiaries. The letter outlines the rules and limitations on the cost-sharing changes, and lists groups of beneficiaries exempt from the changes, which includes individuals with family incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level for (FPL) for premiums and individuals at or below 100 percent FPL for other cost sharing. States must ensure that cost-sharing aggregates do not exceed 5 percent of family income for a monthly or quarterly period. The letter also includes guidelines for how states can enforce cost-sharing. According to the letter, states can terminate eligibility if an individual fails to pay the premium for 60 days or more. CMS also provided guidelines for special rules for cost-sharing for prescription drugs, allowing states to use this as a mechanism to encourage beneficiaries to use drugs from the preferred drug list. The cost-sharing provisions became effective March 31. The SMD letter is available online at <http://www.aphsa.org/disabilities/publications/CostSharing-SMDletter.pdf>.

ACF Seeks Public Comments Regarding Information Collection

On June 15, the Administration for Children and Families issued a notice in the Federal Register requesting authority to renew information collection (1) to conduct federal on-site eligibility reviews of the title IV-E foster care program; (2) to monitor state plan requirements under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act; and (3) to enforce the title IV-E anti-discrimination requirement through a state corrective action plan. Comments made within 60 days will be accepted on the necessity and utility of the

information collection as well as ways to minimize the collection burden on states. The notice was published in the June 22 Federal Register (71 FR 35910-35911) and is available online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

David Berns Joins Casey Family Programs

On June 21, Casey Family Programs announced that David Berns has been hired as the executive vice president of Child and Family Services. The position was previously held by William C. Bell, who is now chief executive officer and president of the foundation. Berns is serving as the Arizona director of economic security, but effective July 10, 2006, he will fill the new position and lead the direct services to foster children and families work at Casey Family Program. The announcement can be found on the Casey Family Programs website at www.casey.org/MediaCenter/PressReleasesAndAnnouncements/ExpertJoinsLeadershipTeam.htm.